Collective Improvisation

The Practice and Vision of Ingemar Lindh

Frank Camilleri

Introduction

Ingemar Lindh is a master of collective improvisation. To introduce him and his importance to 20th-century laboratory theatre to English readers, I will quote extensively from various sources, particularly his book *Pietre di Guado* (Stepping Stones; 1998a), published posthumously.

Lindh was born in 1945 in Gothenburg, Sweden. From 1966 to 1968 he studied with and assisted the founder and master of corporeal mime, Étienne Decroux, at the *L'École de Mime di Étienne Decroux* in Paris. In 1969 Lindh and three other students (Yves Lebreton, Maria Lexa, and Gisèle Pélisson) were expelled by Decroux after Lebreton disclosed their intention to visit Jerzy Grotowski in Poland for some months. This visit would have rendered further work on the demonstration-performance that Decroux had been painstakingly developing with his core group of collaborators impossible (De Marinis 1993:128–29). Decroux did try to salvage the

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Figure 2. Étienne Decroux (left) and Ingemar Lindh, undated photograph from the late 1960s. (Courtesy of the archive of the Institutet för Scenkonst)

research he had done with the group by inviting Lindh, Lexa, and Pélisson to return to Paris, but they all stuck by Lebreton (129). Together the four founded Studio 2, "the first professional mime troupe in Scandinavia" (Watson 1993:6), and were soon approached by Eugenio Barba, who hosted the troupe at his Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium in Holstebro, Denmark. After a year and a half there (1969–1970), Lindh returned to Sweden where he worked in Stockholm as a teacher at Teaterstudio and served as head of the mime faculty at the State School of Dance.

In 1971 Lindh founded his own theatre laboratory, the Institutet för Scenkonst (Institute for Scenic Art), and for five years (1971–1976) the Institute operated in the isolated northern Swedish forests of Storhögen and Nyby. This intense period of formation and research was fraught with hardship. From 1976 to 1983, the nomadic Institute was without a permanent base, offering workshops to individuals and holding pedagogical residencies in Sweden and France (Lausanne and Conches in 1979; Vaudreuil Ville Nouvelle in 1979/1980). During the 18 months that followed this last residency, severe financial restrictions and the need to "find oneself" led individuals within the Institute to either break away and work on their own or stop altogether. During this period Barba invited Lindh to work in Holstebro and participate as a teacher in the 1980 International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) sessions at Porsgrunn (Norway) and Stockholm (Sweden), and in the 1981 sessions at Volterra (Italy). The members of the Institute began working together again in 1982. For the first four weeks they convened at the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium during Odin Teatret's absence, and then toured Germany, Spain, and Italy, with their performances *Fresker* (1979–1982) and *Exercises in Solitude* (1981) as well as giving workshops.

In 1983 the Institute moved to Italy, and in 1984 it found a home in the Teatro della Rosa (Theatre of the Rose), Pontremoli, where it operated until December 1996. During this period the group established the International Center for Autopedagogy and Theatre Research, and in 1995 Lindh cofounded the *x*HCA (Questioning Human Creativity as Acting) research program at the University of Malta. He died suddenly, of a heart attack, in June 1997 during a break in a work session at the Summer University project of the University of Malta. Lindh's book *Pietre di Guado* was published in 1998. The Institute is currently based in Nygård, Sweden, led by Lindh's closest collaborators Magdalena Pietruska and Roger Rolin.

Bibliography

The number of published works on Ingemar Lindh is not commensurate with his prolific output as a practitioner. The material that exists in print is almost exclusively associated with his apprenticeship and work with Decroux (see Cruciani 1995:235–44; Lindh 1996; and De Marinis 1999; see also Barba 1995:57, 89, 173). Publications that concern the Institute's work on

Figure 1. (facing page) Ingemar Lindh in the mime study L'Oiseau et Le Chasseur, *at Teatro Laboratorio del G.A.S., La Spezia, Italy, 1984. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)*

collective improvisation are mainly in Italian and Swedish (see Lindh 1998a, 1998b; Attisani 1987; Giuntoni 2004; in English see Stanley 1991 and Lindh 1995). Most of this material is by Lindh himself and was not intended for publication: it includes transcripts of interviews, lectures, workshop discussions, and conference presentations as well as letters and diary entries by colleagues and students. The improvisational and performative quality of these texts is particularly appropriate when considering Lindh's emphasis on the actor's need to engage what he calls the "social situation" during collective improvisation. The solid grounding in the practice that characterizes Lindh's published material is often accompanied by a sharp observation of human behavior in everyday life—an ability no doubt honed during his work with Decroux, who demanded clinical observation of human action.

Pietre di Guado, for example, is "a book not written but spoken" (Lindh 1998a:xi).[1] The first two chapters are based on a transcript of a workshop on collective improvisation, entitled "Stepping Stones," conducted by Lindh for actors of Grenland Friteater in Porsgrunn, Norway, in 1981. Chapter 3 is made up of two long letters by Lindh to a friend, the first detailing his artistic biography and the second commenting on the knowledge acquired in the process. Chapter 4 is an interview with Lindh, and chapter 5 is a chronology of the Institute's 25 years of operation under his direction. Photographs by Maurizio Buscarino and Stefano Lanzardo provide visual documentation of the Institute's history and research. The book has the flavor of a collective improvisation, both in the way it eschews single authorhood and in the manner that certain themes recur in different contexts. A Swedish edition of the book appeared in 2003; the English, which I have edited and introduced, is set to appear in 2010.[2]

Most English-speaking readers would have come across the name Ingemar Lindh in publication in Barba and Nicola Savarese's *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, which features Lindh as an ISTA "invited artist" (2006:313).[3] Indeed, much of Lindh's bibliographical visibility is due to Barba, who invited him to Holstebro and ISTA on various occasions. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* features three sets of photographs by Savarese, which depict Lindh demonstrating exercises taken from Decroux (94–95, 204–05). All featured photos of Decroux in this book are attributed to Lindh (313).

Collective Improvisation

The rest of this essay will focus on Lindh's major contribution to 20th-century theatre practice: the adoption of improvisation instead of directorial montage, fixed scores, and choreography as an organizing principle in the performance of theatre. In resisting single authorhood and fixed, predetermined structures, Lindh's use of improvisation situates him within the context of postmodernity, and in the process marks him as a strategic case study in the current postdramatic debate.[4] The crossroads of tradition and postmodernity marked by Lindh's practice offers

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1. All quotations from Lindh's *Pietre di Guado* (1998a) are based on the unpublished English translation by Benno Plassmann, Marlene Schranz, and Lindh's close collaborator Magdalena Pietruska. All other translations from Italian sources into English are mine.

2. The first two books in the Black Mountain Press series dedicated to European Contemporary Classics/Theatre, namely Eugenio Barba's *Land of Ashes and Diamonds: My Apprenticeship in Poland* (1999a) and *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (1999b), list Lindh's *Stepping Stones* on the top of the list of "books already in the process of translation and production" (Barba 1999a:184; Barba 1999b:336). The back pages of the series' latest publication, Krysztof Plesniarowicz's *The Dead Memory Machine: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death* (2004), still feature *Stepping Stones* as a future publication. The forthcoming English edition of Lindh's book will be produced by a different publisher.

3. The second edition of this book is dedicated "to the memory of Katsuko Azuma, Fabrizio Cruciani, Ingemar Lindh, Sanjukta Panigrahi, and I Made Pasek Tempo, founders of ISTA" (Barba and Savarese 2006:2).

4. The term "postdramatic" refers to the practical and theoretical phenomena described by Hans-Thies Lehmann ([1999] 2006).

itself as a strategic area of study: the actor's work on herself within a technologically informed postdramatic context that is not, for the most part, dependent on the craft of the actor. It is not my task in this essay to discuss the seemingly incompatible aspects of tradition and postmodernity, except to indicate that this tension is the impetus behind Lindh's practice. This introduction to Lindh is an analysis of the terminological framework that surrounds his practice, highlighting Lindh's *vision* of collective improvisation. A detailed description of the training process and performances of the Institute will be part of a later study.

Social Situation

Lindh identified the "social situation" as a crucial element in collective improvisation.[5] The term implies considering "the whole context as material for work," with the context ranging from "colleagues, encounters and situations which ensue" (Lindh 1998a:57), to time and space, to "actions, costumes, stage props, text, music, etc." In other words, the social situation encapsulates "all that is outside of the actor" (68). Lindh believed that a laboratory-based investigation of the mechanisms of social situation could lead to the identification of principles of collective improvisation. The dynamics of social situation provided Lindh with the "means whereby"[6] collaboration among actors could be developed as a discipline with the aim of exploring improvisation as a method of organization distinct from directorial montage and choreography. By widening the field of signification for the performer, and thus extending the limits of what provides performers with the material to generate and organize their work, the mechanics of social situation announce a (performance) text that is conducive to the proliferation of meaning.

An essential component in the investigation of social situation mechanisms is a context where there are two or more actors in "a continuous and constantly changing flux of encounters" who are in "a state of vigilance," a "kind of understanding" (1998a:57). Lindh often used the term "listen" to underline this state of vigilance, asking actors to "listen to the situation, to the colleagues, to one's own actions and to their resonance" (57). The term "listen" plays a key role in Lindh's investigation of improvisation. For him, "listening" is when "you start to make your acts reactions, instead of conscious acts" (in Stanley 1991:56). Though "listening" is used in a metaphoric sense to signal a state of bodymind awareness, not unlike Phillip Zarrilli's image of "the body becomes all eyes" (2002:184), there is a nonmetaphoric shade to it that applies to the whole body:

> This listening does not involve only the ear but the whole being of the actor. Perhaps it is not so much a question of "understanding" but of "perceiving." What is important for the actor is to perceive that something has happened. It is not necessary to know "what" has happened. Once it is perceived that something "has happened" one can find out "what it is" that has happened. (Lindh 1998a:58)

Lindh's distinction between knowing what has happened and perceiving that something has happened is related to the seminal distinction he makes between sense and signification—a distinction I will shortly discuss in detail.

Lindh's insights on listening in the context of laboratory training are not unique. Most forms of actor training in the 20th century have been directed toward fostering an organic state of heightened awareness and receptivity. Lindh's specific contribution is the adoption of listening's irreducible "here and now" aspect as the primary facilitator of an encounter within a composi-

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5. In *Pietre di Guado*, such terms as "social situation" are set in italics rather than in quotation marks as they are here. The terms are emphasized not so much to highlight their privileged status as to indicate that they are working phrases used by the Institute that do not strictly correspond with their predominant usage (Pietruska 2007).

6. This is a characteristic formulation of Lindh that refers to tools that allow human beings to do something: "When we are working we need 'means whereby,' that is, things to do" (1998a:144).
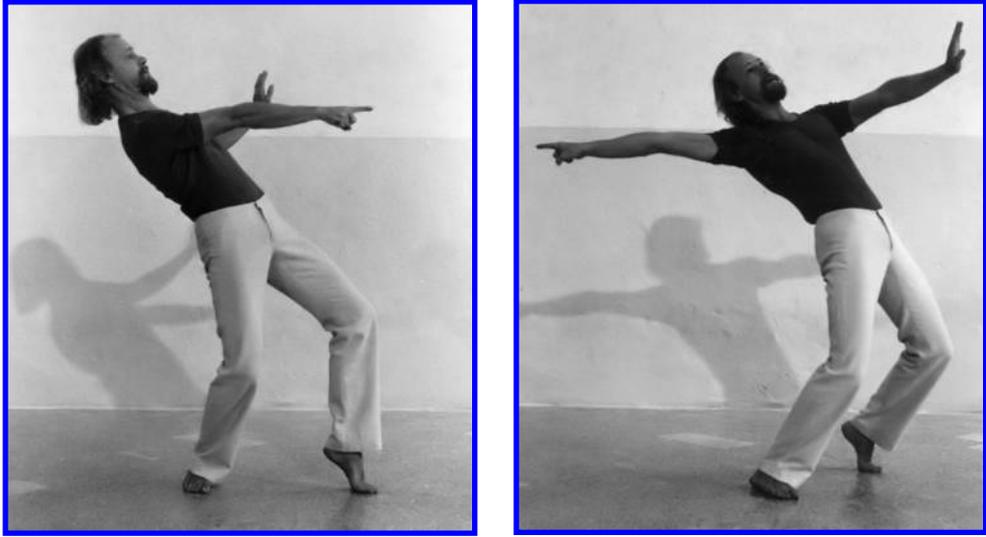
Figures 3, 4, 5. Ingemar Lindh demonstrating the various ways of "showing" and "pointing" in Decroux mime, during the Volterra ISTA in 1981. (Photos by Nicola Savarese; in Barba and Savarese 2006:204)

tional process that is also an aesthetic and a poetics. In his research, Lindh aspired to cultivate the ability of "listening" *within* a performance situation as the means whereby the spontaneity of everyday life can be made present. Though actions and words in a performance are, to varying degrees, "already prepared, […] in the moment they should happen they are consequences of your listening, and not of your wanting to act" (in Stanley 1991:56). Collective improvisation, which allows actors the ability to listen and react, is the frame Lindh used to conduct his processual exploration of dramaturgical and compositional devices.

Apart from the "here and now" dimension of improvisational occurrence, Lindh announced his postmodernity when he alluded to the nature of "what" is perceived in this kind of listening. It is neither "a question of interpreting a situation in an anecdotal manner so as to perform the anecdote; nor is it the case of developing it according to a preconceived logic" (1998a:58). Lindh spoke instead of finding a "sense," often by means of dynamics, behind an anecdote or a gesture or any other component of the social situation. The difference marked by Lindh's terms "sense" and "signification" is pivotal for determining the status of "what" is perceived in the ability to listen, since it is necessarily linked with the legibility of the actor's work.

Sense and Signification

In *Pietre di Guado* and other Italian publications, Lindh used the words *senso* and *significato*. "Senso" can be translated unproblematically as "sense," marking a very broad territory of "making sense," which is not necessarily related to rationalized thought. "Senso" could be anything from a mental image or memory to a tactile feeling or gesture, as long as the image, memory, feeling, or gesture has some kind of psychophysical resonance that is recognized by the bodymind in the here and now of occurrence. "Significato" is more problematic because it is not quite the equivalent of "signification" in English, even if that is the way Lindh himself translated the term whenever he spoke in English (see for example Lindh 1995:75).

The problematic distinction between "sense" and "signification" in the Institute's work is due to Lindh's adoption of the terms from the French to describe very precise phenomena, even though not all languages share this distinction. Pietruska observes how in Swedish the same word, *betydelse*, can be used to translate both "sense" and "signification" (2007). In the Swedish
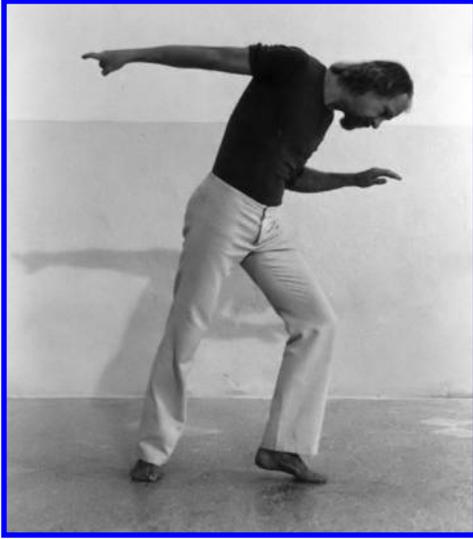
version of *Pietre di Guado*, Pietruska and Rolin felt compelled to use the French word *sens* to mark "sense/senso" ("the meaning that an act or gesture has irrespective of the situation/context"), and the Swedish *betydelse* for "signification/significato" ("the meaning that an act or gesture acquires because of the situation/context") (Pietruska 2007). But this still does not adequately describe the phenomena that Lindh is trying to distinguish in practice.

From a Saussurian perspective, "signification" marks the process of *becoming* meaning rather than meaning per se. But there is a distinction between Saussure's and Lindh's use of the term. The way that Lindh uses significato is neither the former nor quite the latter, even though it announces "meaning" in instances that mark a closure of the signification process. I believe the word "signification" can be rehabilitated as the best fit for Lindh's "significato." In the Saussurrean process of signification, senso takes on a fixed meaning once the arbitrary nature of the bonding between signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept) comes to an end and the sign is integrated within a system. But for Lindh, significato is not destined for closure; it remains open and provisional in the shifting context of social situations. Lindh asserts that it "is not possible to determine the signification of theatre, but only the sense. The signification depends on every spectator, we work on the intention" (in Attisani 1987:111). Pietruska provides a useful description:

> The senso of an accomplished act by the actor is […] immanent to one's own action; thus belonging to the present. In contrast, significato is defined by the social situation and changes according to the context. The significato does not belong to the present but to a subsequent reading of the context. It is thus fundamental that an actor works in every moment on the senso of one's actions, which does not necessarily have to correspond with the significato of the situation. (Giuntoni 2004)

In this context, "significato" is indeed "signification," understood as a meaning-in-process that reaches closure *after* the event as an interpretive act and therefore when it is too late to influence it in performance. It is in instances such as these that Lindh highlights his postmodernity, especially in regards to Lyotard's account of the postmodern artist whose work has the character of an *event*: its realisation in the here and now occurs too soon for its author to formulate the rules of its composition—the rules are formulated after the event when it is too late (1984:81). Lindh's interest in the mechanisms of spontaneity in everyday life led him to avoid fixed structures and predetermined meanings in theatre, such that signs are not predetermined but dependent on the occurrence of the performative event. Lindh's position is reminiscent of Lehmann's discussion of the postdramatic use of theatrical signs:

> Signs can no longer be separated from their "pragmatic" embeddedness in the *event* and the *situation* of theatre in general, when the law that governs the use of signs is no longer derived from representation *within* the frame of this event or from its character as presented reality but from the intention to produce and render possible a communicative event. (104)

Lindh's seminal distinction between sense and signification is evident in his account of the "phrase" as a "common denominator" or "reference point" that makes collective improvisation

possible. Like every other aspect of his terminology, Lindh's account of the phrase is rooted in practice:

> It can be a musical phrase, a physical phrase—a series of physical movements—or a dynamo-rhythmical, literary, melodic, or vocal phrase. It is always an action that has a beginning, a development with a precise direction, and an end. A precise action is always a vehicle of sense. In a context the sense acquires signification, and at that point the actor is capable of improvising, that is, capable of creating physical and vocal themes, creating visible signs of his or her own mental process, and changing and developing them to encounter the world around them and adapt to a new situation without losing the sense. In the building of the performance, another level is added: when two or three senses meet, a signification comes about […] Even though the actor does not work on signification, awareness of it is required for the entire structure of performance to be mastered. (1998a:99–100)


Figure 6. Magdalena Pietruska in Saffo *(1995), directed by Ingemar Lindh, at Teatro della Rosa, Pontremoli, Italy. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)*

In this account, a precise action has the potential of acquiring meaning in a context (a social situation) where the actor has the whole picture at one's disposal, i.e., in a context where no constituent element (usually the text, but it can also be a fixed physical score or a choreography) has a predetermined privileged status. The availability of the "whole picture" announces the possibility of improvisation, i.e., of "anything could happen." This aperture characterizes a great deal of actor training in the 20th century, especially as developed by Meyerhold, Grotowski, and Barba. Lindh's breakthrough was to appropriate this element as a compositional and aesthetic process within the performance event itself, as in performances such as *Fresker* and *To Whom It May Concern* (1985) where the actors had an itinerary of phrases or encounters (with each other or with objects) but the manner in which these occurred was left open and depended on "listening" to the situation.

Reference Points

The framework of improvisation envisaged by Lindh is neither that of "anything goes" nor of happenings or performance art. The "anything could happen" dynamic in Lindh's work is

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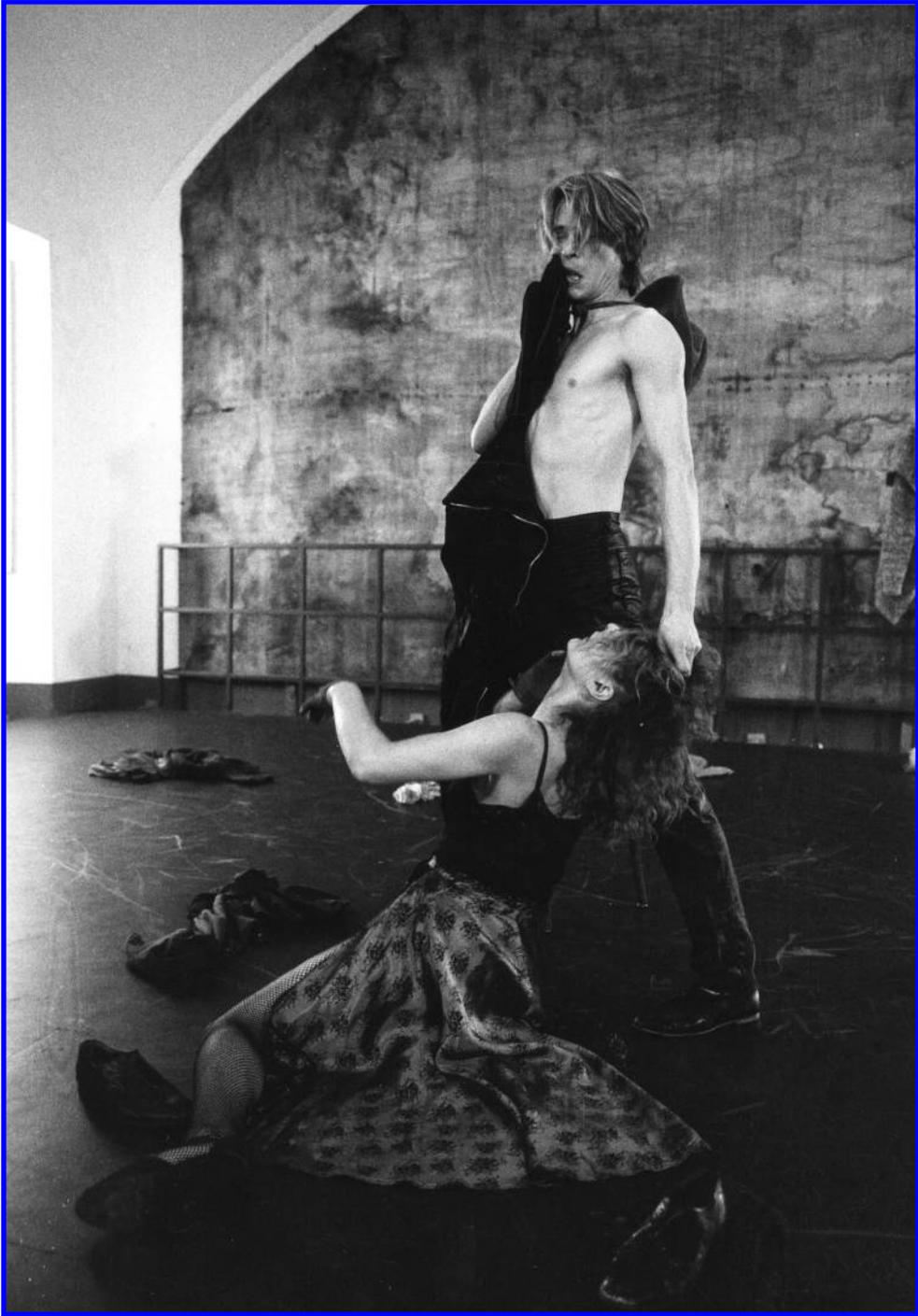
Figure 7. Magdalena Pietruska and Roger Rolin in To Whom It May Concern *(1985), directed by Ingemar Lindh, at Teatro della Rosa in Pontremoli, Italy. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)*

rooted in the discipline of the actor's work on precision in the tradition of Decroux and Grotowski. The first thing to consider in discussing what is meant by "anything could happen" in Lindh's improvisation work is the paradigm of everyday life:

> Theatre is something that is artificial. Life is put inside a frame […] we call "the performance." The actor knows exactly what needs to be done. There is a score. The performance starts, the actor moves in a certain manner for a certain length of time, and then the performance ends. This never happens in life. I know what I have to do: I know that I have to go to a shop to buy something. That is my aim, my intention; but I do not know whom or what I shall meet on my way […] We can never foresee what will happen on the way even though we know the way. (1998a:65)

Lindh's research was inspired by the tension that exists in life between the known (e.g., where we want to go) and the unknown (e.g., what could happen on the way).

The known in Lindh's work is often marked by the presence of reference points that coincide with what has already been identified as "the phrase." The known is also marked by what Lindh calls "themes," which emerge in moments when sense acquires signification (100). The nature of a theme is quite complex: it can be "purely physical" (e.g., a gesture, pattern of behavior, or special dynamic); "mental" (e.g., the content of an action or an event); "global" (if it marks the content of a scene or entire performance); internal or external (to the actor); or a point of arrival or departure. A theme could be anything, but the crucial factor is:

> that the actor never loses sight of what it is about and what he or she has to remain faithful to. It is not possible to make variations on something that is not known; nor is it possible to develop it. If one wants to get to the point of varying and developing one's own themes it is imperative to know them. (71)

The theme is thus a reference point that allows the actor to explore variations while at the same time securing a form of coherence during improvisation.

Lindh locates the unknown within the context of the encounter, which ranges from forms of exchange with other human beings to contact with inanimate objects in various situations. The unknown is not necessarily a mysterious element, and it would be misleading to locate Lindh's unknown within, for instance, Lyotard's concept of the unpresentable.[7] The unknown for Lindh is the "not yet known"—which implies that it is knowable and therefore potentially presentable. Lyotard's concept of the unpresentable becomes useful in looking at the "sublime" quality that Lindh ascribes to encounters during improvisation (57) and at the sublimation the actor's incarnation of performance material entails (43–46).[8] Though not quite the unpresentable, the unknown in Lindh functions on a parallel wavelength, generating the "means whereby" the improvising actor—unshackled by the constraints of signification but always a carrier of sense—challenges the limits of representation in the here and now of occurrence. This challenge is also announced by Lindh's view of language: "Are we expressing ourselves thanks to […] language, or in spite of […] language? […] It is our fight with […] language that creates expression" (in Stanley 1991:92). In Lyotard's postmodern sentiment of the sublime, allusion to the

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7. Lyotard's account of the unpresentable is informed by Kant's sentiment of the sublime. The unpresentable marks "ideas of which no presentation is possible" (Lyotard 1984:78), e.g., the infinitely large or small, a powerful feeling or a state of being, the universe, "humanity, the end of history, the instant, space, the good" (1991:126). The unpresentable defies presentation in that it rests beyond the capabilities of representational techniques.

8. To Lindh the term "incarnation" stands for the total assimilation of an exercise or a score of actions (see Lindh 1998a:44). The use of "sublime" and "sublimation" is informed by Catherine Belsey's lucid discussion on the overlapping but distinct Lyotardian and Lacanian contexts that surround the two terms respectively (2005:118–32; 139–48).

Figure 8. Pia Andersson, Roger Rolin, Hakan Islinger, and Magdalena Pietruska in To Whom It May Concern *(1985), directed by Ingemar Lindh, at Teatro della Rosa, Pontremoli, Italy. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)*

unpresentable occurs in the failure of representational devices to fulfill their promise (1984:78–89; 1991:98). The representational devices that Lindh both implicitly and explicitly problematizes in his practice include directorial montage and choreography—two elements that are still prominant in most forms of postdramatic theatre.

Equivalence

The limits that frame "anything could happen" for Lindh are closely connected to the status that he bestows on theatre: "In theatre, certain things can simply not be done. One can only pretend to die or to kill. For the act to be 'true,' it has to be transformed. One has to find an *equivalence*" (1998a:61; italics added). The artificiality of theatre, which announces the limits of what could be done in the scenic space, is also what paradoxically presents the actor with infinite possibilities of sense and signification by way of equivalence.

Equivalence is one of the principles discussed by Barba and Savarese in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*. An account of Lindh's demonstration of Decroux's *Le belle courbe* opens the chapter on equivalence in this book (2006:93). Barba and Savarese observe that equivalence, "which is the opposite of imitation, reproduces reality by means of another system. The tension of the gesture remains, but it is *displaced* into another part of the body" (94). Though the formal structures of mime have been left behind in Lindh's later work, the precise observation of reality that equivalence entails has been retained. Indeed, it has been extended to incorporate reality as *content* (rather than merely as form) in order to "recreate the vital mechanism, that permanent alertness which functions spontaneously in everyday life" (Lindh 1998a:72). When it partakes of mental precision and intention, "content" is integral to the reference points that make improvisation possible.

"Intention" and "mental precision" are other key aspects of Lindh's work. In the Institute's parlance, "intention" is a composite of "to tend toward" (to project and place oneself in the direction of) and "tension" (to mobilize one's energy in a specific direction). Pietruska comments:

> Intention in our work terminology indicates this small movement of mind that is at the beginning of every act and indicates an act's mental direction. In life we are always acting out of intention. Intention can be conscious or not, and it does not need to be manifested through the movement of the body in space. Intention is prior to impulse (which is physical, involving directly nervous and muscular systems) and can be concretized both through stillness (non-movement) and movement. (2007)

It is important to qualify that this perspective does not imply the predominance of mind over body. Lindh's work on the performer's psychophysical sensitivity during collective improvisation informs and is informed by such "mental action." In this context, "mental precision" can be described as a phenomenon that partakes of bodymind mechanisms in as much as the actor's ability to "listen" and "(re)act" is cultivated by means of codified and empirical forms of actor training developed by the Institute.[9]

Lindh's work on mental precision sets him apart from other 20th-century theatremakers, including Grotowski, because Lindh was interested in an element that precedes impulse.[10] The aesthetic that emerges from Lindh's investigation of mental precision is reminiscent of Lyotard's account of works that belong to the postmodern sublime. In the strategic failure of representational devices to satisfy their agenda, works that belong to an aesthetic of the sublime achieve what Lyotard calls, after Kant, a "negative presentation" that alludes to, rather than represents, an "unpresentable" (Lyotard 1984:78; 1991:98). In resisting the predetermined structures of directorial montage, fixed scores, and choreography, Lindh's exploration of collective improvisation via mental precision is conducive to a process of signification that is always already in progress, and that can only be obtained in retrospect when it is too late to condition occurrence. And if Lyotard's unpresentable is reread in light of the Lacanian real that is castrated with the advent of language and culture (see Lyotard 1991:1–7),[11] then the allusion that permeates the sublime aesthetic is to something that, though resistant to presentation, is nonetheless an integral part of the human condition. What we are talking about here is an aspect of everyday life (a "content") that becomes perceptible in certain moments of an aesthetic that impossibly attempts to operate in a context prior to the closure of Saussurean signification (what Lindh marks by senso) by means of an act that can be located prior to physical impulse (what Lindh marks by mental action or intention). The complex nature of Lindh's research makes it necessary to introduce his work by means of an analysis of the framework that surrounds his practice. To merely describe the resultant aesthetic of this process risks stagnating the Institute's performances into fixed phenomena—something that they were not. Future publications will tackle

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9. The Institute's codified training regimen included mime, Kung-Fu, Tai Chi, calligraphy, and music. Empirical processes specific to the Institute evolved from an adaptation of sports-based isometric principles to actor training. For a detailed account of the Institute's daily practice and training, including "mental precision," see Camilleri (2008).

10. Pietruska refuses to consider Lindh's approach as a neat synthesis of Decroux's and Grotowski's. His work on intention and mental precision, while necessarily building on Decroux and Grotowski, marks a unique development that cannot be traced to either master: "For Ingemar it was logical not to return to the physicality of the actor; this had already been done and it could only be applied. That which he sought to reach was that which was not yet accomplished: to work directly on mental precision" (in Giuntoni 2004).

11. For a lucid discussion on the matter, see Catherine Belsey's *Culture and the Real*, especially chapter 8, "The Real and the Sublime: Kant, Lyotard, Lacan" (2005:119–38).

the issues of the Institute's training and their performances. The photographs by Stefano Lanzardo that accompany this essay provide some visual cues for the conceptual framework being discussed here.

Lindh's distinction between sense and signification also compels us to reconsider the question of motivation: Why does an actor perform an action? An improvisatory paradigm, whose exigencies differ from those of montage or fixed scores, necessarily entails a reevaluation of the mechanism underscored by motivation.[12]

In *Pietre di Guado* Lindh tackles the question of motivation twice in the context of "empty" gestures that supposedly lack sense (1998a:61, 73). Lindh defines a gesture as "a sign of an action and not the action itself," thus distinguishing between an action and "the manner in which it is accomplished" (35). Though not itself an action, a gesture is *part* of an action, and an action is always a vehicle of sense. Lindh asserts that in the context of a social situation where experienced actors improvise on the basis of reference points, empty gestures do not exist:

> A gesture could initially seem "empty," but this is not so. Emptiness does not exist. The gesture can be more or less clear and eloquent, and one can be more or less aware of it, but behind it there is always a sense that can be rediscovered. […] The situation is in a continuous state of flux, and it can happen that one unexpectedly accomplishes a gesture or an action that one had already accomplished countless times before but now has a resonance […] for the actor and those around her. This is the moment when a sense is found and the actor's actions merge with mental themes. (61–62)

The process of totally assimilating an exercise or a score of actions (which Lindh calls "incarnation"; 1998a:44), and the generation of situations and encounters, propose an actor whose work is not via but *towards* a signification that remains always open within the confines of equivalence. There is no "emptiness" in a context cultivated by mental precision—where the actor's behavior is contextualized by a constellation of wide-ranging reference points. As the actor becomes progressively familiar with her own material, the "purely physical aspect becomes less important and gives way to content" (62). In content (not to be mistaken with motivation), improvisation retains a grip on the structure that makes it possible in the first place. The aesthetic elements are free to change because they have not been fixed, but the content—the mental precision marked by the cultivation of reference points—is what the actor remains faithful to.

In the first half of the 1980s, the period that influenced the writing of *Pietre di Guado*, the Institute pushed the research on the principles of improvisation to vertiginous extremes by processually reducing the referential quality of reference points. In the performance *Fresker*, the demand for exactness of gestures was substituted with a series of "models" that demanded flexibility on the actors' part in the concretization of these reference points. After *Fresker*, even these models were removed so that Lindh's performers could "concentrate fully on the liberation of the flow of energy [thereby] giving birth to a series of intentions, following no other logic (on the level of results) than liberating maximum energy and going beyond one's limits of the possible" (Lindh 1998a:105). This was nothing new as far as training was concerned. The laboratories of Wrocław (Grotowski) and Holstebro (Barba) had exposed Lindh to the practice of challenging limits by way of biomechanical and plastique training to liberate the

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12. Motivation is distinct from intention. For Lindh an intention to do something (e.g., the mental act that precedes throwing a pebble) can be corporally manifested in diverse ways (e.g., a movement of the head). This kind of work does not require a motive in answer to the questions: *why* am I throwing a pebble? or *why* do I want to throw a pebble in the first place?

Figure 9. Magdalena Pietruska in Exercises in Solitude II *(1985), directed by Roger Rolin and Ingemar Lindh, at Teatro della Rosa, Pontremoli, Italy. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)*

flow of energy. The Institute's specificity was the exploration referred to in the assertion that: "Now the exercises were no longer there, […] not even the need to recognize the result of the intention in order to then take it up again and transform it into working material […]" (106).

This process of elimination, whose mechanisms are reminiscent of Grotowski's "via negativa" but whose development in the areas of mental precision and collective improvisation is Lindh's, has manifold implications. To do these implications justice while giving a sense of Lindh's approach, I quote him at length:

All the problems concerning the credibility of the actor based on motivation, identification, etc., had been a heritage weighing on the theatre for a long time, an evil considered necessary in the process of creation. Nobody, however, has been able to explain concretely either what it is or what it consists of, simply because there is no explanation. There are no other reasons to act, especially in theatrical reality, except those we find in ourselves. […] So, we eliminated the exercises and aesthetic references. The imperative to act remained as a residue but without "motivation," even if this had to be substituted with another one. I am not so much referring to a new "reason" here, but to the necessity to always concretize a reference point. If I admit that action is the unproven proof of the existence of things, I do not need to look for a "reason" to act. […] ("*Si Deus est, Deus est*"—"if God is, God is"—is the last line of St. Sebastian in *Fresker*. The existence of God is not a problem per se; it is only a problem when we feel the need to prove it to ourselves through our own actions.) (1998a:106–07)

Figure 10. Ingemar Lindh in Porsgrunn, Norway, 1996. (Photo by Stefano Lanzardo)

In this scenario, the web of encounters weaved *in situ* by the Institute actors aspires to achieve extra-daily status for what is essentially the paradigm of everyday life. While it is not difficult to find parallels to Grotowski's and Barba's training processes, the performance implications of the extreme lengths Lindh explored are unique. The resistance to predetermined scores (including the elimination of codified exercises and aesthetic references) presents a vertiginous space where the only navigational coordinate is processual and experiential. In this dimension, the only "motivation" to act is the *imperative* to act in the here and now. Concepts such as "intention," "precision," "truth," "memory," "repetition," indeed of "theatre" itself as a practice, are placed in a position that demands reconsideration.

The conditions of possibility of such a seemingly impossible practice converge in Lindh's research, which is related to his interest in chaos:

[B]ecause I happened to end up in the cave of Decroux, precision was given to me as a gift. And I never felt the need to search for it any longer; it was just there. And that in a way eliminated my fear of chaos, and I started to be more and more curious about the perfection or the organic organization of chaos. Because chaos is only our lack of capacity of perceiving. (1995:67; see also 1998b:60)

De Marinis called this "a vision of theatre without restrictions, based on the intimately connected principles of total improvisation and of the actor 'as author of collective creation *hic*

et nunc'" (quoting Magdalena Pietruska; 2007:289). Collective improvisation can thus be viewed as a manifestation of Lindh's fascination with the "organic organization of chaos." The means that allowed Lindh to conduct this research was a practice that cultivated his ability to listen, perceive, and act in the here and now—a bodymind awareness that is not constricted by predetermined scores or montage procedures but which instead retains a foothold in structure by way of intention understood as mental precision.

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